

Dear CT Legislative Education Committee,

I am a West Hartford Public School parent active in the Charter Oak (elementary school) community supporting student-led sustainability efforts. As an Assistant Naturalist at a local park, I also have the good fortune of interacting with all second, third and fourth graders across town, watching as they connect - sometimes for the first time - with the sights, sounds and scent of the outdoors. Interestingly, children seem to grasp the importance of environmental stewardship instinctively - much more readily than the grown-ups - and have taught me a thing or two. If you follow these children as they move through middle and high school I think you will find them asking why haven't we done more to prepare them for the existential crises of their lifetime - climate change?

The first thing we can do is lead by example to show our children we take science seriously and take every action we can to reconnect to the land, protect our water and air, and reduce our carbon footprint – support alternatives to fossil fuel, support local agriculture and food system, consume smarter, waste less. Next, we offer our children from PreK and up an authentic learning experience, one in which they get to apply their education to the very real-world problem of reversing the human impact on the climate.

It will be tempting to dismiss the movement for climate change education based on politics alone. Please don't. We are all bombarded by headlines informing us of the latest radical and damaging change to our environment so it's not surprising that students want to respond to the urgency of this situation. We engage with our children on a variety of complicated issues yet climate change remains largely untouched. Why, especially when this is one area where our entire school community can make changes that have an impact daily, if not hourly on climate change?

As a parent and educator I choose action. On a memorable day last year I had the pleasure of watching a rowdy group of 4th graders grow silent as they explored the beauty of the salt marsh at Hammonasset State Park. We talked about the critical functions of a salt marsh as a filter, a sponge and a nursery for wildlife - an ecological hotbed. Later that same day I heard a news report that a salt marsh somewhere off the CT shore completely disintegrated. I was devastated and worse, I left part of the story untold. Our children deserve to know the whole story and their role in it.

Please make a commitment today by calling for climate change education, implementing environmental and sustainability literacy programs and by supporting actions that reduce the carbon footprint of our schools.

Regards,
Kim Hughes
1083 Farmington Av
West Hartford, CT 06107